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Inside Information

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JOHNSON TIPS ATTACHES ON INTERVIEWS

When agricultural counselors and attaches from around the world were in Washington, D.C., recently for a week of consultations and briefings, about 20 of them took advantage of USDA's Office of Information's offer to advise people on handling interviews by media.

Jim Johnson, chief of the Radio and Television Division, told them such things as:

- when you're asked questions outside of your field, say so and decline to answer them,
- don't use excessive hand gestures,
- don't let your eyes wander (as if you were trying to escape),
- don't wear clothing that is "too busy."

Two of the counselors/attaches took advantage of the Video and Film Division's one-on-one videotape training sessions, where the interviewee is subjected to a typical press interview, and then the tape of this critiqued.

Jim Lafferty, chief of the News Division, is usually part of the interview "seminar" but was in Dallas.

USDA'S PUBLIC LIAISON HAS NEW HEAD

Ronald B. Buckhalt has been named director of USDA's Office of Public Liaison.

Since 1983, Buckhalt has been confidential assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs. Previously, he was director of the legislative affairs staff of the Rural Electrification Administration. Formerly, he was press secretary to Congressman William L. Dickinson (R-Ala) and held key posts in several trade associations.

Buckhalt is a native of Alabama and received a journalism degree from Auburn University.

Buckhalt succeeds Chris Mosher Wilson, who resigned.

FOOD ATTRACTS MEDIA LIKE FLIES

Food is a hot topic no matter how you slice it. So when USDA and the Food and Drug Administration threw a conference on food safety and nutrition in Dallas June 27-28, at least 60 people showed up.

Jim Lafferty, chief of the News Division of USDA's Office of Information, estimated that half of those attending represented media while the others were government and industry reps.

Media interest centered on (1) the Mexican-style cheese manufactured in California which was linked to 52 deaths, and (2) irradiation of food.

CNN interviewed three speakers and carried other stories on the conference, while all the local tv stations and print media carried stories.

The program included topics such as risk management, meat and poultry inspection, and up-to-date information on such headline issues as sulfites, food irradiation, and salmonella. There were discussions on the Dietary Guidelines, labeling, current research on human nutrition, foodborne disease, and the safeguarding of the U.S. food supply at international airports. Experts talked about the use of antibiotics in animal feed, and the status of food assistance.

Writers from the Dallas Morning News represented not only the agriculture beat but also travel--the latter because of the guest beagle from the detector dog teams of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Another such dog, trained to sniff out prohibited meats and fruits in passengers' baggage, made a hit with New York media earlier, when Kate Alfrend of USDA's Office of Information, arranged for a demonstration there.

Lafferty said media reps seemed especially appreciative of the contacts made available there and in explanations on "how to cut through the bureaucracy"--advice from John M. McClung, director of USDA's Office of Information, and Jack W. Martin, associate commissioner for public affairs at FDA.

Ann Chadwick, director, Office of the Consumer Advisor, USDA, was a guest on one television show and answered questions on an evening phone-in show.

Lafferty credited the regional information staff of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service with excellent staff work on the conference.

In San Francisco, site of the next such conference, July 25-26, the program will include a tour of the new Western Human Nutrition Research Center at The Presidio and feature a discussion on the correlation between diet and criminal behavior. Otherwise, the Dallas program will remain largely intact at San Francisco.

Similar conferences are planned for Chicago, August 22-23; Atlanta, September 19-20; and New York City, October 31-November 1.

EX-SECS JOIN BLOCK IN CONFAB

Orion Samuelson, farm director at Chicago's WGN radio station, called it "somewhat of an historic event" June 19, when Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block was joined by four former Secretaries in a satellite news conference at USDA in Washington.

He ought to know, if anyone does. Samuelson has interviewed all of them while they were in office.

Joining Block in the 45-minute one-way television, two-way audio event involving more than 700 radio and television stations were Bob Bergland, Earl Butz, Clifford Hardin and Orville Freeman.

WINDOW OPENS, THEN SHUTS AT APHIS

It sure hasn't happened very often in the last few years. But for a very few days this June, public affairs specialists from USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service were not out on field duty at the site of some infestation.

"There was a brief spell in mid-June," explained Wayne Baggett, emergency program coordinator of the legislative and public affairs staff of APHIS, "when everyone was back from the gypsy moths in Oregon and the medfly in Miami, before somebody was sent out to the grasshoppers in Idaho."

APHIS fields people to gather information quickly and accurately, then provide it to the media, which usually are right there where the action is.

This kind of support, Baggett explained, also relieves program managers from dealing frequently with media.

In the last five years alone, there have been outbreaks of Newcastle disease in birds, avian influenza, citrus canker, and the medfly...at least.

Then there was the time an entire warehouse was tarped in the middle of Manhattan, so that it could be fumigated against the khapra beetle.

"That got a lot of attention," Baggett mused.

Next is an assignment for someone on the team to a bovine tuberculosis program in New Mexico.

And so it goes.

AG OUTLOOK DESCRIBES FARM BILLS

As debate swirls on Capitol Hill over legislation proposed to succeed the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, which expires this fall, USDA's Agricultural Outlook publication has stepped back from the fray and given its readers a cool journalistic description of the eleven comprehensive bills that had been introduced by the time the June issue went to press.

The 22-page analysis begins with a narrative that breaks down the various bills into their common elements. But the centerpiece is a 14-page chart that summarizes the provisions of each of the major bills.

Unfortunately, only a very limited supply of the publication is available and those from Ben Blankenship, director of the Information Division of the Economics Management Staff, which publishes Agricultural Outlook. For mail purposes, he's in Room 440 of the GHI building of USDA in Washington, D.C. 20250. His phone number is (202) 786-1504.

A year's subscription to this monthly is available for \$29 from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

BLOCK'S HEAD SPEECH WRITER LEAVES

Gene Hemphill, assistant to Secretary John R. Block and Block's chief speech writer, left USDA July 5 to become director of communications for the American Sheep Producers Council, Inc. in Denver. He starts his new job July 22.

Hemphill came to the Department of Agriculture in April 1981, to take over speech-writing duties.

ACE'S NEW PRES INSTALLED, THEN MARRIES

Three hours after she accepted the gavel as the new president of Agricultural Communicators in Education, June 27, Patricia Loudon drove to the courthouse in nearby Fairbanks, Alaska, and got married.

The bridegroom is Corlette C. (Cam) Calvert, an animal research scientist at the animal nutrition laboratory of USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Beltsville, Md.

Loudon is deputy director of information for the Extension Service in USDA. She is only the third USDA communicator to serve as president of the 72-year-old professional association. She succeeds Larry Quinn, chief of the Video and Film Division and Teleconference Center for USDA's Office of Information.

The installation of Loudon occurred on the final day of this year's national ACE conference on the campus of the University of Alaska.

The new national president-elect of ACE is Don Springer, head of the Agricultural Communications Department at Texas A&M University. Joe Marks, science writer at the University of Missouri, is new vice-president.

Other new board members installed at the conference included:

Diane O'Connor, Forest Service, as D.C. Region director; Ted Holmes, University of Louisiana, Southern Region director; Gary Vacin, Kansas State University, North Central Region director; Tom Waldinger, the Fertilizer Institute, Associate Members director, and Mark Allen, of Michigan, director for retirees.

Retiring board members include: William Carnahan, Extension Service, USDA, retired; John Sperbeck, University of Minnesota; Randall Cofer, University of Georgia; Fletcher Sweet, of Tennessee; James C. Webster, of Virginia; and JoAnn Pierce of Florida.

Carnahan and Betty Fleming, teleconference coordinator at USDA's Office of Information, long-term friends of Loudon, served as witnesses at the wedding.

Fleming served on a panel on telecommunications at the conference. Carnahan was the conference photographer.

More than 100 persons attended the conference, which was addressed by Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block via satellite on the first day.

Major subjects covered in the conference were Pacific Rim agriculture and economic development, cross-cultural communications, and telecommunications.

John M. McClung, director of the Office of Information, USDA, described "Frontiers I See" and Hal Taylor, former director of Public Affairs at USDA, reviewed "Frontiers I Have Seen."

Horace Tyler of Indiana was honored as this year's recipient of the ACE Professional Award, the association's top award.

BAKA HEADS DESIGN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

George Baka, chief of the Design Division of USDA's Office of Information, chairs the design advisory committee for INSPIRE 85, a forum and festival on the handicapped scheduled for Sept. 17-21 in Washington, D.C.

The festival is an interagency effort conducted by the President's Committee on Employing the Handicapped in cooperation with the National Committee on Arts with the Handicapped and other public and private sector organizations. It is designed to showcase the outstanding achievements and capabilities of handicapped persons.

INSIDE INFORMATION is published for distribution to public affairs and information staff members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, its agencies, state departments of agriculture and land grant universities. Any items, comments and inquiries should be addressed to either John Crowley or Nancy Bevis, Office of Information, Room 536A, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250 or to AGR009 mailbox on the Dialcom system, or call (202) 447-7454.

